

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION MINUTES

6/28/2006

Chair Knox White called the Transportation Commission to order at 7:35 p.m.

1. **ROLL CALL** – Roll was called and the following recorded.

Members Present:

John Knox White

Jeff Knoth

Michael Krueger

Robert McFarland

Pattianne Parker

Robb Ratto

Absent:

Eric Schatmeier

Staff Present:

Obaid Khan, Supervising Civil Engineer

Barry Bergman, Program Specialist II

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

<i>Commissioner Knoth</i> moved approval of the May minutes. <i>Commissioner McFarland</i> seconded. Motion approved unanimously, 4-0 (Commissioners Ratto and Parker did not attend the May meeting and abstained).
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3. **AGENDA CHANGES**

Item 6B was moved up on the agenda. Commission Communications moved to end of meeting.

4. **COMMISSION COMMUNICATIONS** (moved)

5. **ORAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Adrienne Longley-Cook, resident and member of the Commission on Disability Issues, noted that there are difficulties for pedestrians at the Alameda Towne Centre.

Staff Khan responded that Public Works had sent a letter to Harsch Investments, the developer, to express concerns about the pedestrian environment and asking for a response by the first week in July.

Susan Decker, resident, stated that it is not only people with disabilities that are having difficulties, and that it is important to make sure that the City doesn't miss the opportunity to enhance the pedestrian environment at the Alameda Towne Centre.

Ms. Decker also inquired about the status of the City's efforts to install sufficient red curb at all bus stops throughout the City.

Ms. Decker also noted that some of the more heavily used bus shelters could use additional maintenance.

Commissioner Parker stated that it is important to enhance the awareness about the graffiti problem, and that the quick removal of graffiti will help to maintain the shelters at a high standard.

Commissioner Krueger noted that graffiti at the shelter located at Santa Clara Avenue and Willow Street lasted for several weeks before it was removed.

Chair Knox White stated that regarding the Alameda Towne Centre it would be important to look at pedestrian access throughout the entire site.

6B. Bunching of AC Transit buses on Line 51

Tony Bruzzone from AC Transit said that they had spent a \$500,000 for new software to help with the bus schedules. Have hired a consultant to help look over the information on the bunching. This will include 25-30 weekday routes, 16 weekend routes and every trans bay line to make adjustments to the time in order to re-write schedules for the buses. This is especially difficult since some drivers finish their routes faster than others. They would be building the schedules from the early part of the route so that at the end of the route spread it out to ease the bunching. He said that hopefully this should help to develop a more realistic schedule and hope to get this implemented by September or early October.

Chair Knox White mentioned that it looked more like the drivers operations is what is causing the bunching.

Mr. Bruzzone said that by adjusting the schedules to require drivers to push in the first part of the route, the problems could be reduced.

Commissioner Krueger asked how much of the problem is due to traffic, and how much to following the schedules.

Mr. Bruzzone answered that more than half is due to traffic especially at University Avenue, College Avenue and especially going south bound including the tubes.

Chair Know White asked if AC Transit ever considered having buses turn express in mid-route to avoid the bunching problem, passengers could be asked to change to the next bus.

Mr. Bruzzone said that it could be done, but a problem is that AC Transit charges for transfers.

Commissioner Parker asked if AC Transit is looking at the prior studies that have been done on it? She didn't think that AC Transit's issues are unique or that the solutions have not been addressed before.

Mr. Bruzzone said that AC Transit has the ability to track every bus using GPS, but the system is not integrated into the scheduling system, so they can't relate this to where the buses are supposed to be. The on-going process of the GPS scheduling interface is going on 5 years. It takes a very long time to influence schedule changes because of institutional issues – the contract has to be reviewed several times with the drivers.

Chair Knox White asked how confident he was on the effectiveness of the new scheduling.

Mr. Bruzzone said that it will at least work better than the current system. The schedule insures that 95% of the buses will leave the terminal on time and that is what they are aiming for.

Chair Knox White asked if the new schedules are implemented and there is still an issue on bunching, would this become an operations issue? One issue is that residents do not want to wait long periods of time for a bus and if they do they will eventually want to find another mode of transportation.

Mr. Bruzzone said that once the schedule improvements have been made, it would be an operations issue, and that the appropriate place to discuss any concerns at that time would be the Interagency Liaison Committee (ILC). He noted that the operations department is trying to add more supervisors, and that the new manager rides the 51 bus, so she is familiar with the problems first hand. But despite the commitment of staff, there are many constraints.

Commissioner Krueger mentioned that dedicated lanes are needed for the transit in order to get reliability. Has seen bunching on Sundays when there are no games or other events that would cause the bunching.

Mr. Bruzzone said that this is mostly a schedule problem and that it would be fixed with the proposed changes.

Commissioner Krueger said that he noticed buses bunching at the beginning of the route and asked what percentage are leaving on time.

Mr. Bruzzone said that it is difficult to get this information because the way the data is recorded it doesn't indicate if the buses are arriving or leaving. However, AC Transit is working on improving this system.

Commissioner Krueger stated that the problem needs to be measured. Wanted to know what type of metrics would be used to calculate this.

Mr. Bruzzone indicated that AC Transit does have planning metrics, but that operations metrics have been a problem. He said that they will be going to the board with service design metrics and service delivery metrics, including headway adherence and on-time performance. He said that the AC Transit Board's Planning Committee will be holding meetings over the next 6-8 months to deal with service delivery issues, and he encouraged concerned Commissioners to participate. Information about upcoming meetings will be posted on AC Transit's web site.

Mr. Bruzzone stated that AC Transit is trying to establish standards consistent with the Transportation Research Board's recommendations. He also mentioned AC Transit's efforts to streamline their environmental review process when they implement service changes. They will establish a service baseline, then if they deviate from that standard, they will hold a public hearing.

Commissioner Parker asked what institutional impediments there are to coming up with standards.

Mr. Bruzzone responded that it is not just an institutional problem, but believes that the new operations manager is committed to improving service delivery and breaking down the cultural barriers.

6A. Policy Discussion of Environmental Review Recommendations

Chair Knox White stated that the Commission made some vague policy recommendations at the May meeting regarding the review of Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs), and he requested that this item be placed on the agenda to clarify the recommendations. Concerns raised at the meeting centered on the impacts of proposed mitigations from EIRs, especially on pedestrian safety. He noted that the staff recommendation was to recommend to the Council that the Commission work with staff to develop interim policies regarding the EIRs, but is concerned that this would take too long, given that projects are in the pipeline.

Chair Knox White suggested taking some recommendations from the draft Transportation Master Plan policies approved by the Commission and use them as criteria that EIRs should meet. He suggested that since the TMP has not been approved yet, and major development projects are moving forward, the Transportation Commission should recommend that the City Council not certify EIRs that do not meet the criteria.

Chair Knox White distributed his recommendations so the full Commission could discuss them. The first page included City policies, including the General Plan, the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) policies adopted by the Transportation Commission, Bicycle Master Plan, the City Council resolution naming Alameda as a "transit first" city, and the long range transit plan. The second page had six suggestions that would make

consistency of the policies with the general plan, long-range transit plan, and the TMP. Last week discussion was increasing traffic volumes, intersection widening, and speed limits to a certain extent. Need to have an analysis done before the Council certifies it.

Commissioner Knoth responded that this type of statement could hopefully prevent some problems, such as those with pedestrian access at the Alameda Towne Centre.

Commissioner McFarland suggested recommending the policies to the Council for while the TMP is under development.

Commissioner Parker stated that the policy statement would point out that many policies are already in place, that in some cases they are vague and not being followed, and since EIRs are coming up for approval, this could be considered as a guiding document until the TMP is in place.. She suggested that at this would at least generate discussion about critical issues. She also noted that some issues may not be addressed here, so the language should be modified to acknowledge that.

Mr. Ratto expressed his concern that the policies appear to be dictating to the Council how they should act. However, the policies would be useful for the TC as a guideline in reviewing EIRs. He also noted that despite various City policies which recommend reducing reliance on automobiles, that is still and will continue to be the major form of transportation in Alameda.

Chair Knox White said that the TC is only making a recommendation to the Council and not attempting to tell the Council how to act or to be disrespectful. He responded that if the language used in the handout was inappropriate, he is okay with rewording it.

Commissioner Ratto expressed his concern with the language, e.g. “reject any EIR...”

Chair Knox White said that this is so that projects won’t be exempted from the policies. The City Council has ability to ignore the General Plan, TC recommendations, etc. However, if they adopt this as their policy, a discussion will have to happen regarding how a particular project does or does not conform to established policies.

Commissioner McFarland recommended that the proposed policies be used as a guide for the TC.

Commissioner Krueger stated that while some generalities in policy are useful to allow for flexibility, if they have too much flexibility they don’t achieve the desired result. These policies would help make clear what things are unacceptable to the City, so that projects will be more consistent with the goals.

Chair Knox White suggested modifying the policy statement to indicate that this is what the TC would be using to guide its recommendations.

Commissioner Parker stated that it is important that the Commission make clear what its priorities are. She said that these issues be discussed at the level where decisions are being made, that it is not sufficient for the Council just to be told that the TC will be using this as a guide.

Chair Knox White said that the policies do not say that a particular project should not be built.

Commissioner Parker said that it was important to indicate why the Commission is putting this forward. The TMP will not be ready before many of the major development proposals are presented to the Planning Board and City Council for decision. Therefore the Commission is transmitting its recommendations to the Council in advance of the TMP.

Commissioner Krueger said if Alameda is including language about improving transit, bicycling, and walking just to sound good he would support removing the language and being honest about what choices the City is making.

Commissioner Krueger said that we as the city have a choice as to how much public money will be spent to accommodate cars and also the amount of private money required to be spent to accommodate cars (e.g. how much to require of developers; protection of open space; impact of road widenings on neighborhood, etc.). He stated that travel choices are not fixed, but other modes may become more popular if we make them more convenient.

Commissioner Ratto said it was frustrating to see lip service toward being a transit first community, referred to difficulty getting red curb zones for bus stops. Mitigations are required, but the reality is still that most people will be traveling by car, and people cannot be forced to use other modes. So the issue is really a question of if the City wants to allow more development to come in.

Commissioner Krueger said it also depends on how much accommodation you want to make. If the city were to make a limited accommodation for vehicle traffic, but instead offer a bus lane, someone moving in might decide to not live there or would move there only if they were willing to take the bus.

Chair Knox White: look at wording and bring it back for additional discussion.

Commissioner Parker suggested turning the text of the policies to the chair to modify the wording.

Commissioner Ratto said it would be helpful if the Commission could meet with the Council so the TC could have a better understanding of the Council's expectations.

Staff Bergman said that the City Manager's Office has been contacted and are following up on their schedules as to when they would meet.

Commissioner Parker moved that the proposal be re-worded to make it clear this is the criteria the Transportation Commission will be using regarding the evaluation and adoption of the transportation section of EIRs, and that the Commission recommend to the City Council and Planning Board they also use these criteria. *Commissioner McFarland* seconded. Motion approved, 5-1 (for: Krueger, McFarland, Parker and Knox White; against: Commissioner Ratto).

Commissioner Krueger noted that sound walls are not addressed.

Chair Knox White mentioned that there is a question about whether sound walls are a transportation issue or not, so he avoided including it.

6C. Transmittal of Commission Recommendations to City Council

Chair Knox White mentioned to write a letter with staff and send it directly to Council, Planning Board, signed by the Chair.

Commissioner Parker motioned that the Commission communicate its decisions by having the Chair write a letter with staff outlining Commission decisions, to be signed by the Chair, and to be sent to the City Council or the Planning Board, as appropriate. *Commissioner Ratto* seconded. Motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

Commissioner Parker suggested to the chair that he should report back to the TC on the reaction of the City Council.

4. Commission Communications

Chair Knox White said that there have not been any meetings with the Sub-Committee recently.

Commissioner Parker said that this would be her last meeting to attend since she is leaving.

9. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.